

UNEP's Regional Seas Annual Meeting 2022

Concept note 18.05.2022

When	25 - 28 May 2022
Venue	Hotel Eden Bleu, Mahe, Seychelles
Language	English, no interpretation
Participants	All 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action plans (RSCAPs) Representatives of the global MEAs, partners and UNEP staff
Purpose of the meeting	Official kick-off of the implementation of the Regional Seas Strategic Directions (RSSD) 2022-2025 UNEA 5.2 Resolutions relevant to marine and coastal environment Ocean governance
Points of contact	Nancy Soi, Kerstin Stendahl, Dixon Waruinge, Theuri Mwangi
Proposed agenda	(Attached)
Excursion	28 May 2022 to Praslin and La Digue Islands

Background

The Regional Seas Programme (RSP) was launched in 1974 in the wake of the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm. It operates in 18 regions, with most regions adopting a regional action plan underpinned by a legal framework in the form of a regional convention with associated protocols on specific issues, referred to as Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs). UNEP provides overall coordination and facilitation and in so doing connects the Programme to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), relevant UNEA Decisions and UNEP's Programme of Work (Pow).

The annual Global Meetings of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans organized by UNEP is a coordination mechanism of the 18 regional seas conventions and action plans, providing a platform for adoption of global strategies for cooperation, channeling UNEP programmatic support to the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, particularly in areas complementary to the UNEP Programme of Work and strengthening linkages between the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans and other relevant global conventions and agreements.

The 22nd Annual meeting of the Regional Seas Programme takes place after a two-year hiatus following the global pandemic. This meeting builds on the outcomes of the 21st Annual meeting held from 3 - 5 October 2019 in Berlin, Germany.

The 22nd meeting comes at a time when the member states at the resumed fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 5.2) endorsed a historic resolution to end plastic pollution and forge an international legally binding agreement by 2024. The fourth session of the intergovernmental conference on an internationally binding instrument under the Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) also progressed its negotiations for an internationally binding instrument with follow-up sessions planned for later in the year. The Twenty-fourth Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 24) and the third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI 3) on the post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework also progressed their negotiations with a follow-up meeting planned for June 2022 and adoption later in the year.

The Regional Seas Programme annual meeting will build on the momentum of these meetings, recent Decisions of their respective Conferences of Parties, and more to discuss Regional Seas Programme's strategic involvement and contribution.

Annotated agenda

1. Opening of the meeting

The meeting will be called to order by Ms. Kerstin Stendahl, Head, Ecosystems Integration Branch, Ecosystems Division at 9.00 AM on 25 May 2022.

The meeting will be opened by a video message by Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UNEP. This will be followed by opening statements by:

- Susan Gardner, Director, Ecosystems Division, UNEP
- Mr. Flavien Joubert, Minister of Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment, Seychelles; and
- Mr Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions.

Thereafter, Ms. Stendahl will lead the meeting into adopting the agenda and the objectives of the meeting.

2. Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025

The Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs) aim to strengthen the capacity within the regions to enable countries to implement the action plans, work programmes and COP Decisions through policy and legal guidance, technical support, education, training, communication and institution-building. Regional Coordination Units (RCUs), often aided by Regional Activity Centers (RACs), service and facilitate countries' implementation of agreed actions under the conventions and action plans. The RSCAPs draw in partnering institutions for delivering key functions, including **knowledge management** and pollution **monitoring**. In

addition to functioning as an effective mechanism for regional marine **cooperation**, testing of protocols and methodologies and setting of common indicators and targets at the regional level help to inform global responses. The RSP therefore plays an important facilitative and normative role.

It is these roles that have provided the focus of the Regional Seas Strategic Directions (RSSD) 2022-2025, in particular the selection of three core goals and the development of a first set of targets and indicators to track progress across the 18 RSCAPs and the RSP as a whole.

The objective of the Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025 is to achieve a diverse, resilient, and pollution-free ocean that supports equitable sustainable livelihoods. This includes climate stability, living in harmony with nature, ocean sustainability and operating within planetary boundaries. The Regional Seas Strategic Direction (2022-2025) was developed through a consultative process with the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans and the support of the University of Wollongong.

The RSSD 2022-2025 provides three overarching purposes:

1. Guide RSCAP activities towards achieving ocean-related components of the three primary global goals of addressing climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, as well as sustainable livelihoods, in particular by working towards achievement UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) 2022-2025 and Programme of Work (Pow) 2022-2023), but also targeting ocean-related components of the SDGs and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
2. Provide an initial 3-year framework to track RSP achievements and the national and inter-regional levels, building a preliminary baseline towards a more robust and impact-oriented set of indicators, and providing comparative reporting to assist RSP reporting as a whole, but allowing for individual RSCAP achievements to be highlighted.
3. Generate information to promote improved advocacy to raise the profile of the RSP within UNEP and UNEA, particularly as an implementing framework for ocean-related goals.

RSSD Roles and Responsibilities

The RSSD 2022-2025 aims to be very specific on the different roles, functions and mandates of the entities involved in it follow up and implementation:

- Eighteen RSCAPs, each with its own autonomous governing body consisting of the countries/Parties in the region, decision-making processes, work plans and budgets to which the Parties/countries contribute to through assessed or voluntary contributions.
- For seven of these eighteen RSCAPs, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is designated as the secretariat, six being administered through the Ecosystems Division and one through UNEP's Europe Office.
- UNEP provides overall coordination and facilitation of work, including convening the Global Annual Meetings of Regional Seas and Action Plans to facilitate dialogue between RSCAPs, endeavoring to harmonize and strengthen regional approaches thus helping to deliver as one.
- The UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) with its universal membership is uniquely positioned to provide overarching global policy guidance, helping to bring together work

of RSCAPs, including facilitating partnering with relevant intergovernmental organizations and other stakeholders.

How does the RSSD 2022-2025 contribute to global processes?

The RSSD will contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, Goal 14 to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources and other related SDGs. More specifically, the RSSD 2022-2025 will contribute to and strengthen the delivery of UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) 2022-2025 and Programme of Work (Pow) 2022-2023, particularly regarding activities that address ocean-related components of the identified priority areas of climate action, nature action, chemical and pollution action, science-policy, environmental governance, finance and economic transformations and digital transformations. In addition, the RSSD 2022-2025 promotes and provides further clarity on the contribution of RSCAPs to UN Decades on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) and Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030). The RSSD 2022-2025 outlines how UNEP's Regional Seas Programme will deliver on regional and global goals and agreements to protect and sustainably use the oceans. The aim is to increase the visibility and strategic involvement of RSCAPs in key processes at global and regional levels, while ensuring that UNEP delivers on its mandate in relation to the marine environment.

After the overall presentation of the RSSD 2022-2025 and initial discussions, statements by the Heads of the Secretariats on their support on implementation of the Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025 will follow.

Organization of the session and expected output: Ms Stendahl will make introductory remarks and present the new strategic directions 2022- 2025. Thereafter she will guide the meeting discussions towards achieving the following outcomes. a) enhanced understanding by all stakeholders on the RSSD 2022-2025 goals, targets and indicators, b) officially kickstarting its implementation, and c) agreed implementation plan and reporting mechanism.

3. UNEA 5.2 Resolutions

At the resumed session of the UNEA 5.2 held from 28 February to 2 March 2022, the member states endorsed several resolutions relevant to the marine and coastal environment. Key among these resolutions are:

3.1 End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument ([UNEP/EA.5/Res.14](#)).

The resolution among others, requests the Executive Director of UNEP to convene an intergovernmental negotiating committee, to begin its work during the second half of 2022, with the ambition of completing its work by the end of 2024. The intergovernmental negotiating committee is tasked to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, which could include both binding and

voluntary approaches, based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastic.

To do this, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme is requested to convene an ad hoc open-ended working group to hold one meeting during the first half of 2022 to prepare for the work of the intergovernmental negotiating committee and to discuss in particular the timetable and organization of the work of the committee, among others.

The resolution acknowledges the need for capacity building and financial and technical assistance especially to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to allow for their effective participation. It also requests the ED to facilitate the participation of, and close cooperation and coordination with, relevant regional and international instruments and initiatives and all relevant stakeholders in the context of the mandate of the intergovernmental negotiating committee.

3.2 Sustainable Nitrogen Management ([UNEP/EA.5/Res.2](#))

The resolution notes with concern the excessive levels of nutrients, in particular reactive nitrogen and phosphorus, the significant impacts on species composition in terrestrial, freshwater and coastal ecosystems, with cascading effects on biodiversity, soil, water and air quality, ecosystem function and human well-being. It recognizes the action already taken by countries and under intergovernmental agreements related to water quality, air quality, climate and biodiversity, and actions by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management, the Global Wastewater Initiative, the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities, Environment Assembly resolution 4/14 on sustainable nitrogen management and the recently launched global campaign on sustainable nitrogen management in 2019.

The resolution encourages member states to accelerate actions to significantly reduce nitrogen waste globally by 2030 and beyond, share information on national action plans, and requests the Executive Director of UNEP to among others, support member states at their request to develop national action plans for sustainable nitrogen management.

This resolution is relevant to several ongoing RS initiatives, such as the Regional Nutrient Pollution Reduction Strategy and Action Plan (RNPRSAP) adopted by the Cartagena Convention COP in July 2021, as well as a similar strategy being currently formulated by COBSEA.

3.3 Nature based solutions for supporting Sustainable development ([UNEP/EA.5/Res.5](#))

The resolution recognizes the importance of strengthening actions for nature for implementation of global goals and targets set out in the existing frameworks such as the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework, etc. It also recognizes the interdependencies between biodiversity loss, climate change, pollution, and interlinkages with human health and well being and the integrity of all ecosystems. The resolution further acknowledges the need for a multilaterally agreed definition of the concept of nature-based solutions, cognizant of and in harmony with the concept of ecosystem-based approaches. It broadly

decided that nature-based solutions are actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits.

The resolution requests the UNEP Executive Director to undertake a host of actions including to compile examples of best practices in nature based solutions, identifying options for supporting investment in nature based solutions, supporting intergovernmental consultations, and to work with governments and other UN agencies to support implementation of the resolution in partnership with youth, women local communities and indigenous people.

3.4 Sound Management of Chemicals and waste ([UNEP/EA.5/Res.7](#))

The resolution among others, notes with concern the fact that the target set by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to achieve, by 2020, the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle was not met as well as increasing levels of illegal transboundary movement of hazardous waste and other wastes reported by developing countries. The resolution requests the UNEP Executive Director to continue and strengthen support for the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management in preparing for the fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management.

The resolution further reaffirmed the relevance and importance of an integrated approach to financing of sound management of chemicals and waste. It also extended the duration of the Special Programme to support institutional strengthening at the national level for implementation of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management.

The resolution urges Member States and invites other stakeholders to take further action to reduce or eliminate the risks associated with the issues discussed in the report by the United Nations Environment Programme entitled "*An Assessment Report on Issues of Concern: Chemicals and Waste Issues Posing Risks to Human Health and the Environment*". It also requests the Executive Director to work closely with the other members of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals and other relevant United Nations entities and instruments, and with relevant multilateral environmental agreements, to foster effective cooperation and collaboration in promoting the sound management of chemicals and waste; and subject to the availability of resources, and in cooperation with the World Health Organization, to update the report entitled "*State of the Science of Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals 2012*" prior to the sixth session of the Environment Assembly.

3.5 Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution ([UNEP/EA.5/Res.8](#))

The resolution established a science policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and prevent pollution. The resolution outlined the principle functions of the panel to include horizon scanning, assessment of current issues, providing up-to-date and relevant information, and facilitating information sharing. The panel is an independent intergovernmental body with a Programme of work approved by its member Governments to deliver policy-relevant scientific evidence without being policy prescriptive. An ad hoc working group is to be convened to prepare proposals for the science policy panel to consider institutional design and governance of the panel; Name and scope of the panel; Principal functions of the panel; among others. The ad hoc working group will also ensure that the science policy panel is able to deliver outputs that are policy relevant without being prescriptive; is interdisciplinary ensuring contributions from experts with a broad range of disciplinary expertise; work of the panel is transparent and impartial; etc. The resolution further requests on the UNEP Executive Director to cooperate closely with the secretariats of relevant multilateral environmental agreements and relevant international organizations and bodies, as appropriate.

Organization of the session and expected output: Ms Stendahl will invite the thematic leads for each of the UNEA Resolutions to introduce the resolution and make a presentation on the resolution and potential entry points for UNEP Regional Seas Programme.

The presenters will guide the meeting towards identification of entry points and action points for the regional seas conventions and action plans within their respective mandates and priority actions in their regions. This will include a consolidated action plan by the regional seas on the identified resolutions based on the agreed actions.

4. Ocean Governance

The session will cover several areas of work by the RSCAPs. This includes the upcoming UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon in June/July 2022, projects, blue economy, and the marine regions forum.

4.1 UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon in June/July 2022

The UN Ocean Conference co-hosted by the Governments of Kenya and Portugal, seeks to mobilize action to propel much needed science-based innovative solutions aimed at starting a new chapter of global ocean action. Solutions for a sustainably managed ocean involve green technology and innovative uses of marine resources. They also include addressing the threats to health, ecology, economy, and governance of the ocean - acidification, marine litter and pollution, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and the loss of habitats and biodiversity.

The meeting will be briefed on the preparation towards the Ocean conference including registration of voluntary commitments, lessons learnt and modes of tracking their implementation. The meeting will also agree on the participation at the conference and possible joint side events considering the extended deadline for submitting requests for side events to 8 May 2022.

4.2 MEA- ACP III

The ACP MEAs Programme is a partnership between the European Union, the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Programme aims to build capacity in 79 countries in Africa, Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP) to support them in fulfilling their obligations as parties to Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), to address the environmental challenges they face and to reap the benefits of improved environmental governance at national and regional levels.

Since its inception in 2009, the Programme is continuing support to ACP countries and is now in its third phase. Phase 1 aimed to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, loss of biodiversity, drought, land degradation, chemicals, hazardous waste, and other threats to the environment. Phase 2 built on the experiences, lessons learned, and achievements gained from the initial phase, to further enhance the capacity of the ACP countries on two clusters of MEAs (biodiversity and chemicals and waste management).

In the current and third phase (ACP MEAs 3), the Programme focuses on three objectives, namely: (i) Improved enforcement of and compliance with Multilateral Environmental Agreements related to biodiversity (CBD, CITES, CMS) and chemicals and waste (Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata), (ii) Improved ACP countries capacities for the management of coasts and oceans in line with the related Regional Seas conventions, and (iii) Enhanced mainstreaming of biodiversity and of the sound management of chemicals and waste in agriculture in ACP countries in line with related MEAs. FAO focuses on the implementation of actions related to the third objective. Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans are partner implementing agencies.

4.3 Blue/Ocean based economies

Ms. Stendahl will invite a representative of the Government of Seychelles to provide a keynote presentation on the government's work on blue economy and its linkages to the Western Indian Ocean Resilience and Prosperity Initiative. This will be followed by a presentation by a representative of UNEP on its work on sustainable blue economy. UNEP's 'Sustainable Blue Economy Initiative' aims to facilitate sustainable ocean-based economic, social, and environmental benefits within the planetary boundaries of oceans and coasts. Engaging with countries, Regional Seas and many partners, it seeks to enhance decision-making, enabling conditions and capacities to develop and implement sustainable, climate-resilient and inclusive blue economy policies, strategies and solutions that reduce human impacts and support the sound use of marine and coastal ecosystems and their services.

A Sustainable Blue Economy Decision Support & Enabling Framework and learning platform is under development to help guide:

1. Mapping, assessment and valuation of marine and coastal ecosystems and their services
2. Circular and resource-efficient economic policy pathways and pollution reduction strategies
3. Governance and management for optimal use of ocean space and resources

4. Sustainable Blue Economy financing principles
5. Capacity building and translation of know-how into action

4.4 Marine Regions Forum conference concept note for 2023

With the support of the Government of Sweden the second Marine Regions Forum (MRF) conference on ocean governance is tentatively planned to be held and hosted in the Western Indian Ocean region in early 2023, pending global COVID-19 developments. MRF was established in a collaboration between the European Commission and the Government of Germany as a platform for collaborative regional ocean governance that would develop new approaches and partnerships for achieving SDG 14. The first conference was held in Berlin in 2019. MRF is hosted and supported by the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, Potsdam; IDDRI; TMG– Think Tank for Sustainability, Berlin; the Swedish Ministry of the Environment; the European Commission Directorate of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries; the German Federal Ministry of the Environment; and Umwelt Bundesamt.

MRF notes that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in a dedicated Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 14), set out a pathway to “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”. Progress toward implementation has been limited and the 2020 deadline for meeting four of the SDG 14 targets was missed. While the process of achieving SDG14 requires accelerated implementation, existing governance frameworks have proven largely inadequate in addressing the immense ocean challenges, declining ocean health and dependent livelihoods.

With the ocean on top of the international political agenda, there is a unique opportunity to develop a robust ocean governance framework. The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), options for a post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework in May 2022 and the second UN Ocean Conference in June 2022 will put ocean health on the international agenda. A treaty is being negotiated to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, and the International Seabed Authority is developing a “Mining Code” to regulate the possible exploitation of the deep-sea minerals.

MRF seeks to see ocean governance being revolutionized, taking an ecosystem-based approach that aligns governance frameworks with interconnected natural and societal systems, addressing the cumulative impacts of human activities, and facilitating the cooperation and coordination needed to ensure the success of critical conservation initiatives.

The proposed MRF conference in 2022 provides a unique space for decision-makers, scientists, and civil-society actors from the world’s different marine regions to discuss and showcase impactful collaborative solutions for ocean health. The purpose is to develop clear recommendations, catalyse actionable outputs, and build partnerships for stronger regional ocean governance in support of SDG 14. The initiative dates back to commitments by Germany and the European Union made 2017 at the UN Ocean Conference in New York and the Our Ocean Conference in Malta respectively, announcing their support in establishing a multi-stakeholder platform for regional ocean governance. The Marine Regions Forum is a

contribution to the Partnership for Regional Ocean Governance (PROG), a collaborative initiative between scientific institutions and UN Environment Programme.

4.5 Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and the Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI)

Ms. Stendahl will invite a representative of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to provide an update on the preparation of the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and possible areas of synergies and opportunities for Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans to engage in this process and in its implementation. The post-2020 global biodiversity framework builds on the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and sets out an ambitious plan to implement broad-based action to bring about a transformation in society's relationship with biodiversity, ensuring that by 2050 the shared vision of 'living in harmony with nature' is fulfilled. The representative of the CBD will also provide an update on the preparation to the fourth session of the Sustainable Ocean Initiative to be held in September 2022.

4.6 UN Decade of Ocean Science

Ms. Stendahl will invite a representative of the IOC-UNESCO to provide an update on the UN Decade of Ocean Science, the road map, and opportunities for engagement with the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans. The Omnibus Resolution for Oceans and the law of the sea ([A/RES/72/73](#)) of 6 December 2017, 292, decided to proclaim the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development for the 10-year period beginning on 1 January 2021. The resolution calls upon the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission to prepare an implementation plan for the Decade in consultation with Member States, specialized agencies, funds, programmes and bodies of the United Nations, as well as other intergovernmental organizations, non - governmental organizations and relevant stakeholders. It requests that the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission provide information on the development of the implementation plan and regularly consult with, and report to, Member States on the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science and its implementation. It also urges the Secretary-General to inform the General Assembly on the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science through his report on oceans and the law of the sea to, on the basis of information to be provided by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission; and lastly, invites UN-Oceans and its participants to collaborate with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission on the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science.

Organization of the session and expected output: Ms. Stendahl will invite the thematic leads for each of the topical areas to introduce the agenda and make a presentation and potential opportunities for UNEP Regional Seas Programme.

Thereafter, the meeting will be guided towards identification of entry points and action points for the regional seas conventions and action plans within their respective mandates and priority actions in their regions. This will include a consolidated action plan by the regional seas on the topical areas based on the agreed actions.

5. Date and Venue for the next meeting

The meeting may wish to decide on a possible date and venue for the next meeting.

6. Meeting declaration

The meeting may wish to consider a meeting declaration which will contain the agreed recommendations and follow-up actions from the discussions for implementation and follow-up.

7. Any other business

The floor will be open for suggestions and discussions of any other business.

8. Closure of the meeting

Having no other business, the meeting will be adjourned.

9. Field excursion: 28th May 2022

A field excursion has been organized with the support by the Government of Seychelles to Praslin and La Digue Islands.